



disability
connect.

Impact Report

July 2024 - June 2025

Contents

<u>About Disability Connect</u>	03
<u>Foreword</u>	04
<u>Inspiring Possibilities</u>	05
<u>Awards and Achievements</u>	06
<u>Community and Partnerships</u>	07
<u>Support Groups</u>	08
<u>Workshops and Seminars</u>	09
<u>Spirit of Adventure</u>	09
<u>Pastoral Care</u>	10
<u>Transition Expo</u>	11
<u>Housing</u>	12 - 13
<u>Celebrating Volunteers</u>	13
<u>Advocacy in Action</u>	14
<u>Final words from our CEO</u>	15

Front cover image description: Indika and Tina dancing at a Bollywood-themed Parent Social Group event. Aleysha our Bollywood teacher smiles and poses in the middle.

Right image description: Isaac is smiling brightly as he has fun at the Bollywood event.



About Disability Connect

Disability Connect is a Disability Information Advisory Service provider serving greater Auckland, with a national footprint.

Our vision

That people with disabilities and their families are able to lead the lives they want

Our mission

To lead and influence positive change for people with disabilities and their families

Our values

To respect and support choice

For and by disabled whānau

Over 80% of our staff live with a disability or have a child with a disability.

Our Board includes one disabled person and six members who are, or have been, parents of disabled people. Their cognitive diversity drives our success, keeping us aligned to our mission.

We're proud to be led by and for disabled whānau - with a cultural representation that reflects our community.

All staff have completed Humanly's Enabling Good Lives training, and our advisors are graduates or have enrolled in a Building Inclusive Communities Course.



Image description: The Disability Connect team smiling together, standing or sitting in front of a large branded sign and wearing branded dark blue vests.

Foreword

Our abilities and disabilities are part of being human. In our families and communities we share the possibilities and challenges they present.

Disability Connect doesn't flinch from the hard stuff. They are an effective bridge to prevent ignorance and evasion, and more importantly, build confidence and potential for good lives.

Run by people who live it, love it, and fight for it, this organisation brings advocacy, awhi and aroha to the front line. They refuse to let outdated attitudes define anyone's life.

To those who financially support this work and those who do the mahi - paid, unpaid, whānau - we owe you. You make our society stronger, fairer, and more human. You help disabled people live fully. That's the kind of leadership we need.

Ngā mihi nui,
Rob Campbell

Friend of Disability Connect



I am pleased to present the 2024-25 Impact Report.

This last year has been very disruptive in the disability sector with many families at a loss not knowing how to move forward. The Disability Connect team has worked incredibly hard to make sure the voices of those who are often unheard, and not counted – get heard.

People perceive that New Zealand is an inclusive society. It isn't until you live the life of a disabled person or family supporting a disabled person, that you realise just how hard it is to fully participate in your community.

Our team has a proven record of supporting families and disabled people at every level - from interacting with agencies to advocating with Ministers of the Crown.

We can't do this alone. We need our friends, our allies on this journey. It isn't just about the disability community doing the hard yards, it's a whole of community effort. We like to think we are in this together.

Thank you for your support.

Ngā mihi nui,
Colleen Brown, KSO
Board Chair - Disability Connect

Image descriptions:
Left - Rob Campbell. Right - Colleen Brown

Inspiring Possibilities

Our counsellor Asoka and her son Indika toured Rhema Media to explore Indika's passions in singing, storytelling and media.

The journey continued with a [radio interview](#) featuring Indika and his brother Sasanka, celebrating the International Day of People with Disabilities.

Their story reflects the power of family support in shaping meaningful futures—and reminds us why we're here: to help disabled whānau pursue their passions and live their best lives.



Image description: Indika talking into a microphone in the Rhema Media studio.

"I just wanted to tell Asoka what an inspiration her interview is to me. I am a parent of a 16yr old with various disabilities and I'm part way through studying to be a counsellor. Until today I was unsure of what placement to seek out, but realised Asoka has my dream job! You've given me a direction and I'm hugely grateful."

Sasanka's Journey is our first documentary, following a young man's path to becoming a Library Assistant at Highland Park Library.

Featuring insights from his mother and employer, it celebrates Sasanka's unique contributions and the taonga he represents.

With music by Jeff Wragg, a parent of a neurodiverse child, the film was entered into the international 2025 Focus on Ability Film Festival.



Image description: Sasanka inside the Highland Park Library, introducing himself as an employee and son at the start of the documentary.



Scan the QR code or [click here](#) to watch Sasanka's Journey.

Awards and Achievements

Richard Blakeborough award for Communication 2025

We're humbled to receive the inaugural Richard Blakeborough award for Communication from the Federation of Disability Centres.

We were commended for our communication across all media platforms, including our own newsletters, social media and mainstream media.

This is special as Richard worked in communications before the disability sector, and has left a legacy of high standards through his roles.



Image description: Denise smiling with her Federation award certificate and trophy, and flowers from Disability Connect.

Disability Information Specialist of the Year 2025

Denise was awarded Disability Information Specialist of the Year at the same Federation awards for her outstanding work as our Community Disability Information Advisor.

She visits many schools and communities, organises Disability Supports in the Community and does an outstanding job of helping people navigate supports including housing.



Image description: The Disability Connect team with Richard Blakeborough's family, smiling together at the Federation awards event. They are holding a trophy, the award certificate and a photo of Richard.



2.5K+ information requests

4.6K+ e-subscribers

25K+ e-newsletter readership

4.9K Facebook followers

Community and Partnerships

Our Community Information Advisors empower whānau by sharing disability support information at hospitals, hubs, events and schools.

We co-hosted “Disability Supports in the Community” with Kaikaranga and Work and Income at Maungarei Community Christian Trust, Orakei CAB, and online. Over 200 disabled people, parents and whānau, community and social workers learnt about funding options.

Popular enquiries included “where do I find a playcentre for a 2 year old boy so his mum can get respite?” and “what is available for my disabled daughter now that she has finished school?”

Our advisors have improved our connection with Kaikaranga, shared tailored advice with hospital staff, supported a Korean community group and built connections with Kia Roha, Epilepsy NZ, Vaka Tautua, Plunket and other organisations.

Masina led the distribution of over 200 pairs of pyjamas to families in need, supported by the Middlemore Foundation.

“It really hits home when parents cry receiving pyjamas so their children can be warm in winter.”

- Masina



Image description: Denise smiling next to the Disability Connect stall at Waitakere Hospital's Community Health Services Open Day.



Image description: An information session on disability supports, hosted at Mt Wellington Community Church. Several people are in the audience, including two men in wheelchairs. There is a large projector screen and a person from Kaikaranga speaking at the front.

“I always point our families in your direction as you cover so many topics. Anyone with or supporting someone with a disability has a struggle ahead and you are there to offer unlimited support. Keep going...we need you!”

Support Groups

At this year's parent gatherings, families, support workers, and disabled children connected through activities like drumming, crafting, and movement.

Labels disappeared—everyone participated equally, blurring roles and differences.

Support sessions offered practical tips, from bedtime to school meetings, building confidence and connection.

These moments fostered inclusion and reflected our mission: creating spaces where all feel they belong.

"Beyond professional advice, they leave knowing their experiences shape stronger futures—for their children and each other."

- Zsuzsa, group facilitator

500+ support group attendees

160+ WeChat group members

430+ seminar, workshop and collaboration event attendees



Image description: In front of a Christmas-themed background, Mangala stands next to her adult son Yugan, both smiling. Yugan is sitting beside Troy Elliott dressed as Santa Claus, who is holding a white gift bag.

After losing her father, a Chinese single mother of an autistic child turned to Disability Connect.

Our Cultural Advisor, Yoky, arranged grief counselling and a bouquet, offering comfort and care.

She felt deeply supported—reflecting our mission of heartfelt, culturally attuned support.

"I thoroughly enjoy mingling with other parents in support meetings... [I] come back home feeling recharged."

Workshops and Seminars

Succession Planning

“What will happen to my son when I die?” is a common concern for families with disabled children. We responded with a 4-part “Succession Planning” series featuring Dr Hemant Thakkar, Nan Jensen, and Erika Butters, including a workshop for families to ask their most pressing questions.

These [captioned videos](#) became our most viewed ever, helping families watch comfortably at home.



Image description: A screenshot of Nan, Hemant, Mike and Erika on Zoom at the Succession Planning workshop.

Spirit of Adventure

Choices and Opportunities for the Best Life

In February 2025, James, William, and Finlay joined the Spirit of Adventure’s four-day voyage for 18–29-year-olds.

Disability Connect promoted the opportunity, arranged buddies, and led briefings—showcasing inclusion and equal opportunity. Their journey became a powerful symbol of connection and possibility.

“This has been our first opportunity for William to participate in a camp without any family support, and it is helping him to build trust with other adults in a very positive setting.”



Image description: James, Finlay and William standing with their families before heading on their journey. The Spirit of Adventure ship is behind them.

Pastoral Care

65 families assisted with pastoral care

Over four years, Disability Connect's "Pastoral Employment Support for Families of Disabled People" has made a powerful impact across Aotearoa.

Many families reduce work to care for disabled children, facing financial strain, isolation, and reduced wellbeing.

Delivered by a qualified counsellor with lived experience, our 6–12 week service helps families rebuild confidence, connection, and belonging.

With clients from Northland to the South Island, demand is growing. Outcomes include 8 parents gaining employment, 13 staying in work, and 4 enrolling in education or training.

These changes improve family wellbeing and open new opportunities for disabled loved ones. The long-term social return far outweighs the cost—building resilience, reducing employment sacrifice, and enhancing health.

This is more than support. It's lasting change.

Supporting families through grief and loss

"After our chat, I felt less down and even managed some housework. Liam's support workers have been reading the social story we made, and he keeps saying 'mum heaven'—I think it's helping him process Janet's passing. I'm grateful you were there for us, even at the end. It meant a lot."

— Marcus, grieving dad of Liam



Image description: Our secure whānau counselling space. It has two comfy chairs with pillows, a tea set, a box of tissues, a privacy screen, and sound-absorbing panels. These support sessions that last as long as needed, sometimes over five hours.

Transition Expo

Explore what's available for disabled school leavers

1200+ attendees

138 stall holders

\$500,000 of information

Transition Expo attendance has steadily built over the last 18 years. Our event hosted at Auckland Netball Centre on 4 September 2024 attracted 138 stallholders, and 1200+ attendees.

We estimate \$500,000 worth of information helping disabled people and their families to explore options and opportunities was shared through this one day!

We are grateful for sponsorship from Mercury and Clipboard, assistance from Able Axxess for their amazing wheelchair ramp and financial support from Lotteries and Foundation North. We simply couldn't make this a free event for disabled people and their families without you!

Not to mention our team who each year work overtime to make the Expo a not-to-be-missed event.

Highlights of 2024 showcased real progress and powerful moments. Cherie Cawdron's Transition Seminar equipped parents with the knowledge to plan effectively for

their children's futures.

Watching disabled youth experience gaming with their peers for the first time through Clipboard opened our eyes to the future —an emotional milestone in access and inclusion.

Conversations with Employers expanded through the New Zealand Disability Employers Network, giving young people the tools and confidence to step into employment with clarity and support.

Each initiative brought lasting impact to families, youth, and the wider disability community.



Image description: Staff member and parent Cherie presents the Transition Seminar to a room of fellow parents at Transition Expo.



Image description: A high angle view of the Transition Expo floor. The gymnasium is full of stalls and a wide range of disabled people, families and supporters.

Housing

Disability Housing Information Service

Housing enquiries to our Disability Information Service have quadrupled since 2019, highlighting the growing challenge of securing suitable homes for disabled people and their families.

In 2025, with support from J R McKenzie Trust, Spectrum Foundation, Foundation North, and our Community Housing Collective, we launched a new Disability Housing Information Service.

Only 2% of New Zealand's housing is accessible, demand is at least 6.5%—and even higher in social housing due to aging and disability rates.

Our service aims to support 40 disabled people annually, offering tailored guidance on funding, location, care, and providers.

Most requests come from parents seeking housing that enables their children to live independently— as they prepare for the future.

With limited equity, families rely on rentals, social housing, family-led models, or residential care. We help them navigate options and connect with providers like Homes of Choice.

We also advocate for change: aligning residential building codes with Australia and Choice in Community Living to be rolled out.

27 families assisted with housing information support in 6 months

115+ housing enquiries

Social housing miracle

Pita, who has tetraplegia, lived in Manurewa after leaving Otara Spinal Unit. Following a fall and hospitalisation, we helped expedite his housing application (A18).

Within six weeks, he moved into a two-bedroom accessible home with a wet area bathroom.

Stability at last

Rachel, a single mum of three, struggled in a two-storey rental with her son Stephen, who has a degenerative disability.

After reassessment (from A14), we helped her secure a four-bedroom home in Takanini and connect with local supports. Life is now more stable.

Housing

Real examples of success and challenges

Waiting for independence

Peter, in his 20s, lives with his parents and cat in East Auckland. He works part-time and hopes to go flatting nearby. He's on the Housing Register (A11) and receives 40 days of carer support annually from Kaikaranga.

Disabled people and their whānau often feel unheard. Ignoring their voices means missing a vital chance to build housing that tackles real hardship. Disability Connect leads change through the Community Housing Collective—amplifying voices, engaging stakeholders, and pushing for government action.

Community Housing Collective Members:

Disability Connect, ME Family Services, Otara Health Charitable Trust, Complex Care Group, Yes Disability, Autism New Zealand, IHC, Cerebral Palsy Association, Te Manawa Respite Care, Spectrum Foundation, Level-up Aotearoa Charitable Trust, Te Ora Puawai, and Aotearoa Disability Law.



Image description: Masina and Denise, our Community Disability Information Advisors smiling together. They are wearing blue Disability Connect-branded clothing.

Celebrating Volunteers

We simply couldn't do what we do so well without volunteers. Our heartfelt thanks go to our Board, Expo sponsors and volunteers Merkle, Mercury and Clipboard, Rotary St Johns, local MPs Greg Fleming, Nancy Lu and team, and families and friends who support us in tangible ways with people power.

800+ volunteer hours this year!



Image description: A large group of volunteers and the Disability Connect team smiling together at an inaugural "Thank you" lunch.

Advocacy in Action

A voice for disabled whānau

We challenged Auckland Transport and SESTA to make the transition to the Total Mobility Scheme easier for families.

At the NZ Disability Support Network Conference, Mike led a workshop helping employers ease anxiety for disabled students during employment conversations.

Our IRD submission proposed stipends to support disabled people into employment—moving beyond minimum wage exemptions.

We met with Corrections to support disabled people re-entering the community.

We collaborated with Westpac on their accessibility survey to improve banking for disabled youth and families.

We responded to the UN Special Rapporteur, advocating for single dads & Asian migrant families in the gendered nature of care.

Our advocacy with Auckland Council promoted longer budget cycles for disabled representation in local government.

At the Auckland Emergency Management hui and national consultations we pushed for parents to be included in disaster frameworks.

Intern Airam Magpantay's research paper on housing resilience for disabled families is now a cornerstone of our housing advocacy.

Through IHC, we accessed data showing that 50% of Aucklanders with intellectual disabilities live in South Auckland, with extreme transience in Otara and Mangere—highlighting urgent housing needs.

We lobbied MBIE to increase granny flat sizes to 70m² to improve accessibility—progress was made, but national incentives are still needed.

We educated over 250 students across MIT, AUT, and the University of Auckland, preparing future social workers, educators, and policy makers to support disabled communities with empathy and insight.



Image description: AUT lecturer, Anienie, and our team members, Asoka, Zsuzsa and Jingjing, smiling after presenting on the inclusive cultural needs of disabled students from migrant communities.

Final words from our CEO

In Aotearoa, families raising disabled children over 14 are missing from data—and policy. The 2023 Disability Survey included carers of children 14 and under, but once those children grow up, their parents' voices disappear.

This gap is structural and growing. Specialist school enrolments are up 21% in five years. Disability Support Services expand 6% annually, and 200 disabled Aucklanders await residential care.

Families ask: how will our loved ones be supported as costs rise and housing stays inaccessible? Exclusion isn't the answer. Inclusion is. When families are left out of data, they're left out of decisions—leading to hardship and fewer choices.

We call for a unified, compassionate vision backed by cross-party commitment, where carers are recognised as key partners. At Disability Connect, we live this daily—providing trusted advocacy and support so families can thrive.

We're deeply grateful to our funders: Whaikaha, Te Pou, Ministry of Social Development, Clipboard, Te Whatu Ora, Foundation North, Lotteries, Lion Foundation, Mercury, Merkle, Lister Presbyterian Health Trust, COGS, Four Winds, Spectrum Foundation, J R Mackenzie, ANZ Staff Foundation and every donor who makes our mahi possible.

Together, we're building a more inclusive Aotearoa. I welcome the opportunity to kōrero further about how you can join us in this vital mission.

Ngā mihi nui,

Mike Potter

CEO - Disability Connect



Image description: Mike Potter smiling. He has short brown hair, and is wearing a pink collared shirt and a blue vest.

"I get information from Disability Connect which I don't get from anywhere else."



Scan the QR code to go to [our donation webpage](#) and help us reach more families with lifelong impact.

Thank you to our partners



**MINISTRY OF SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT**
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO ORA

Health New Zealand
Te Whatu Ora

MERKLE
a dentsu company

**SPECTRUM
FOUNDATION**

 **THE LION
FOUNDATION**



COGS
Community Organisation
Grants Scheme

 **Four Winds**
FOUNDATION



Staff
Foundation

CLIPBOARD

 **Whaikaha**
Ministry of Disabled People



Image description: The Disability Connect team laughing together with their hands in the air. They are standing or sitting in front of a large branded sign and wearing branded dark blue vests.

e: admin@disabilityconnect.org.nz
p: 09 636 0351
www.disabilityconnect.org.nz

**disability
connect.**
helping families